

## Letter from Elsie Bell Grosvenor to Marian Bell Fairchild, January 10, 1939, with transcript

(copy of letter from Mrs. Gilbert Grosvenor to her sister, Mrs. David Fairchild) COPY  
The Beverly Wilshire, Wilshire Blvd. between El Camino and Rodeo Drives Beverly Hills,  
California January 10, 1939 Dearest Daisy:

Bert has just sent you off a telegram detailing at some lengths our impressions of today, but I cannot sleep until I have written you a line giving some account of our day's adventures and doings.

We were met at the train this morning by Colonel Joy and a whole army of newspaper reporters and cameras who took a tremendous number of pictures of our arrival. At Pasadena, many came to meet the Editor of the Geographic, as well as the daughter of Alexander Graham Bell.

Then we were whisked off in an auto to Los Angeles and a luncheon of the Advertisers Club. (This was not arranged by Colonel Joy but approved by him.) Then we were delighted to meet Mr. De Forrest of the De Forrest Vacuum Tube and more recently of television fame. He remembered us at once and spoke of meeting us in Washington at Papa's house. Then he went on to speak of a memorable visit he had with Papa in Scotland where he and Papa had explored Stirling Castle together. He gave a most interesting address at the luncheon, predicting that in the future television would tie up with the movies and show movies in the home by television. At present the small size of the picture and the necessity of using very short waves — less than 3 yards — which could only be sent short distances — not over 50 miles — was holding up the commercial development.

Bert also gave a 5 minute talk — a perfect gem!

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From the lunch we came out to this hotel, where we found Mary Thompson in our rooms in a great state, as my own personal bag had not turned up! It 2 had some of my jewelry in it, including the pearl cross which was Mamma's wedding-present from Papa. So naturally we were all much excited about it. The regular Grosvenor—Bell—Fairchild commotion and excitement may be visualized! It was finally located at the railway station, where it was left on the platform, and was finally delivered here intact!!

We were surprised at the beautiful, clean and neat appearance of the Fox Studio grounds. So many sounds and confusion until we reached set 6, where the picture was being filmed! We met the director and many associated with the production of the film, including Don Ameche himself; Loretta Young wasn't there today but we saw some snaps of scenes taken a day or so ago of her and Gertrude. We all liked Loretta Young and her sisters (her real sisters are taking the part of "Mabel's sisters".) They really seemed to have caught the idea of the whole thing very well. The costuming was delightful. The way she watched her sisters' mouths and eyes was very well done.

We saw a short shot of Mr. Hubbard — a study of the make-up; very true to life and not artificial looking.

At present they seem to prefer not to follow Papa's appearance closely. He is portrayed clean-shaven! Personally I think it is a mistake. It prevents my getting into the spirit of the play. I understand they expect in the last scene, at the opening of the Transcontinental Telephone Lines, to have the make-up perfect. They have taken a cast of Don Ameche's face and molded it into the correct likeness — hair and beard and everything. Don Ameche explained it to me, but I don't quite know how it was done.

Don Ameche seems very much of a gentleman, very sincere and intensely interested in getting Papa's spirit across. He is proud of being chosen to take the part, and he certainly has a beautiful voice. Do listen to him on the "Charlie McCarthy" hour over the radio. Grosvenor and Joan can get the station for you. They listen in every Sunday night.

Don Ameche wanted to know if Papa ever got excited and how he showed his displeasure, whether by raising his voice or gesticulating in any special way. I told him about Papa's profane "Tos". And he at once caught the idea and said he knew just where to use it. I was particularly impressed with their desire to be as accurate as possible, especially in details.

They have sent numerous cables to Buckingham Palace to ascertain the proper court garb of the Queen's secy at that time! They are using the pictures of the Cambridge (Mass.) house and rooms which Bert had for the Cambridge set. The arrangement of furniture and shape of rooms may not be identical, as it is necessary to get the cameras and lights at the proper angle. I understand the director and actors are temperamental, and one must use discretion in making suggestions, for, after all, they really have had a great deal of experience in taking pictures! They are not sparing expense in trying to create the right impression of our parents.

I was a little disappointed in Don Ameche's personal appearance. He is not as dynamic a personality as I could have wished, but we have yet to see a film of him in the picture. It was interesting to see them rehearse over and over again the scene at the piano, in the beginning of the play.

Melville gave Don Ameche some valuable hints about the way Papa played the piano and carried himself, which Don Ameche immediately seized upon and put into action. You could see the improvement in the acting as we sat there.

The reason at present they are leaving off the whiskers is that, in the first place it is very difficult to show expression when the face is covered with hair; secondly, there are so few people today who are used to seeing whiskers that whiskers provoke a laugh and seem to raise a barrier between the actor and his audience that he has to fight to overcome. It prevents the audience from getting into sympathy with the character; the audience is too much distracted by the whiskers to appreciate the fine points of the acting. The audience is

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used to 4 seeing beards only on slapstick artists and comedians. I am trying to get them to at least use a mustache. I don't know whether I will succeed. They seem more desirous of putting over Papa's character and spirit than to adhering strictly or at all to his personal appearance. And after all, that really is the most important thing. They are smoothing out the language, as you suggested. They have added, at the suggestion of the Telephone Company, some lines to explain why the telephone instruments are leased instead of being sold, and striking out the slang; also giving Grandpapa Hubbard the credit for the idea for leasing.

We saw one short scene of Mabel; Mrs. Hubbard sending a telegram to Alec that they were coming to the court with documents. It was delightfully done and the gowns charming; no unpleasant suggestion of pregnancy, just a becoming cape and bonnet.

I am going to try and suggest that they show more clearly Mama's passionate devotion to her mother and tell them about Grandmamma's having taught Mamma and that it was her insistence that saved Mamma's speech, and had her taught to read the lips; to see if they cannot put her character across with more strength. She is shown as sweet and sympathetic and understanding in the photographs I saw, but I think her strength and nobility of character should be stressed more.

It is most interesting being here and everybody is kindness itself; apparently so anxious for our approval. Bert thinks compliments and taffy will go a long way with them.

It is necessary to have contrasts in the scenes, and I think the songs were amusing and not objectionable. The lines in the first scene much more funny than they seemed when reading the script.

The film is not the "Life of Alexander Graham Bell"; just "Alexander Graham Bell — The Romance of the Telephone."

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With over so much love. I'll write soon again as the film progresses.

How I wish this did not coincide with Nancy Bell's wedding! I'd set my heart on being present. I love your child and children very much, Daisy dear, and am so sorry to miss this important event in Nancy's life. But I know you understand and approve.

Lovingly, ELSIE P.S. Please let Gertrude and Gloria see this letter, as I haven't time nor strength to write them too about this just now. P.S. The weather is glorious; warm, not too hot.